

WILLIAM A. LITTLE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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TODD HAWKINS
STAFF MEMBER, UNITED CONSTRUCTION WORKERS ASSOCIATION

INTERVIEWEE: TODD HAWKINS

INTERVIEWERS: WILLIAM LITTLE

SUBJECTS: UNITED CONSTRUCTION WORKERS ASSOCIATION; BLACK CONSTRUCTION WORKERS; BLACK APPRENTICES; BUILDING TRADES UNIONS; RACISM; DISCRIMINATION; SHUTDOWNS; ORGANIZING; GROUP HEALTH HOSPITAL; UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON; COURT ORDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE; CONTRACTORS; *UNITED STATES V. IRONWORKERS LOCAL 86*

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[00:00:00] **TODD HAWKINS:** I first became involved in UCWA in 1970 doing the actual investigations of the 86-18 case [United States v. Ironworkers Local] , when they were in process. It was shortly thereafter that we began to meet. Well, at first, a small group of people began to meet in different homes, but I first became acquainted to him at a meeting that took place at 23rd and Cherry. Well, excuse me, not 23rd and Cherry, at the YMCA on 23rd and—that is Howell or Olive? Somewhere, I can't remember the exact street. This was a number of people who were trying to get into the construction trades and weren't having any luck at it. And people saw the need to like, organize, to become an agent.

[00:01:19] **WILLIAM LITTLE:** Ready though?

[00:01:23] **TODD:** We were dealing with things about the structural position of the organization. You know, what would be the duties of different offices, people holding different offices. Other things that were talked about was money for facilitation of the office and office space, things like that. And shortly thereafter, or at the same time, things were talking about immediate relief that came out of the court's order, how to institute immediate relief, steps on how to take it. People began to, like, go down to the unions and sign up for the apprenticeship programs. The name plaintiffs were taken into the union, given status either as journeymen or apprentices at that time and began to actually work in the industry.

Also during that same time, like the other things, unforeseen things began to happen in the industry. Racism really began to flourish. The insurmountable number of incidents on jobs where journeymen or white workers did not want to relate to the new Black journeyman or apprentice, did not want to teach him, did not want him in the shops.

One case in particular I always remember is there's one incident where a Black journeyman, excuse me, a Black apprentice was sent to Group Health Hospital, and upon arriving at Group Health Hospital, they would recognize him to be what they called during that time a "court order apprentice." And they told him if he would just sweep the floor and take care of the office, keep the area clean, he could stay employed. The apprentice also saw that if he didn't obtain any facets of the trade on his next job, all he would be qualified to do was to sweep and clean up. So a meeting was called, and a decision was made to, like, close a job down. And the next day, Group Health was closed down by a pretty large number of people just taking over the project. There had been other incidents before that one, but that was just one that I happened to be in during that time.

There were other instances where we went to different construction sites. Long before that was at the University [of Washington], there were other incidents where people went and locked equipment and did quite a bit of civil disobedience to one, show that there had to be something done to enforce the court order. For two, that was the only thing left for them to do. I mean, they had a court order that wasn't being implemented, and nobody looked at it seriously. And so that was one of the prime functions of the organization at that time to add those issues and to focus on that. Excuse me. One minute, I had answers.

And, you know, at that time, like nobody had any answers, and we were all just trying to figure it out. There were a number of tactics used, but after a period of time, after confrontations with employers, different confrontations with the unions, employees, and a few workers, some of the problems were alleviated. One of the reactions from union members is that they gathered—I forget the exact number this time, but they marched on Olympia in protest of the court's order, saying that this new order threatened their jobs, they were really not well informed.

A lot of these problems could have been alleviated if the union leadership would have took the initiative after recognizing that their practices in the past had been discriminatory. The union leadership would have took a progressive step and made the rank and file members knowledgeable about what the court order really meant, in essence, bringing Blacks into the industry. Just a lot of problems would have been alleviated.

This is 1975, and some of those problems are still in existence, you know, just by misunderstanding. Although, like the court order, did enhance opportunities for white apprentices as well as Black apprentices. The unions also at that time, shortly after the court order—after the court handed down its relief, the unions went back into court trying to keep control, I guess over the labor industry or—we've never heard it from them exactly what they were trying to do, but in doing the whole trials and things, like testimony was only given by Black apprentices. And unions were back in the courts and asked the courts—because the first court order is really for minorities, and that's of course, to remove that and to re-emphasize that, since testimony was only given by

Blacks, the court order reads for Blacks only. And it's like served as an issue, to start to divide the other third world communities, you know, and that's still in existence even today.

I'm sure we tried a number of ways to, like, get other third world people into trades. We've had some minor success at it, you know, because we had to, like, send those through contractors that we know would take them on and see that they got proper training and receive some kind of status within the unions. Also, we tried to develop jobs for the third world people who are interested in the construction industry, also to develop jobs with people from within the association itself.

There's been a number of times that we've had to go back into the courts for clarification of the court's order, interpretation of the court's order, there's constantly been modifications to it. Committees, the court and its first order also set up a committee, which was called COAC, Court Order Advisory Committee. The COAC was actually supposed to be like the agency that was formed to implement the court's order. It was made up of people from business management, the state, labor, the minority community. But in reality, it was just a quasi-committee on a platform to discuss problems that were existing with the court's order, and they've never really done anything to try to make the court's order work, to implement the court's order.

[00:11:10] **WILLIAM:** Okay, let me get back to some other specific thing. What are your functions within UCWA?

[00:11:16] **TODD:** My specific functions is like a job developer, counselor. When we say job developing, like, we go out to contractors and try to identify places where apprentices or journeymen can be placed. When we say council, like, we try to prepare the guys that are going into one of the trades, or have decided to go into one of the trades. We try to prepare them and to get them ready for what to expect, what the trade is going to be like, also to make them understand their commitment. Also to, you know, direct them to proper places when they have problems. Also to organize, when we say organize, we talk about organizing for whatever purpose necessitates at that time. It may be an issue of one job—a worker is on a job with a specific problem, they need a place to come together to discuss certain matters. Also we carry out the responsibilities, the wishes of board members. Board members are made up of the workers, other responsibilities to catch y'all. Some other-

[00:13:10] **WILLIAM:** I don't really know, I think I might have to start writing [?into it?].